

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Update on the U.S. Public Health Response to the Ebola Outbreak”
November 18, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

We are all grateful for the courageous men and women who are currently serving at the front lines of the Ebola crisis, both here in the United States and in West Africa - the nurses, the doctors, the disease experts, and the logistics specialists. We could not be more appreciative for their hard work and sacrifice.

This committee remains focused on the Ebola epidemic because it continues to rage on in Africa. And as it does, it continues to present a risk to the health and safety of those living in the United States. Although Ebola may no longer be on the front pages, the situation remains grave.

Our focus today is on the federal government’s continuing response to the crisis. In the beginning, the government’s response was slow and uncoordinated - guidelines for health care workers were continually revised, and there was a lot of confusion over how to handle travelers coming from affected parts of West Africa into the United States. We can and must do better, and that’s what this oversight hearing is about - collecting the facts, identifying lessons learned, and working together to ensure that these lessons are incorporated into current and future planning.

As I made clear at our last Ebola hearing and in several letters to the administration before that, the time for a real strategy that works is well overdue. Lives are on the line and results matter. The doctors and nurses and service members on the front lines – including some who I know personally – know this is not a drill. And they know from experience that the U.S. and world response has not been good enough. We owe it to them, to the rest of the American public, to the people of Africa, and to the rest of the world to get this right.

I want to reiterate that Congress is a willing partner in the fight against Ebola, and our first priority is to protect the American people. It is unrealistic to think we can fight Ebola or any other public health threat on-the-fly, but that seems to be what’s happening – both at the U.S. and international level – and it’s unacceptable. So while the global health community bears responsibility to finally get ahead of this epidemic, we cannot afford to wait and hope for the international response to improve. We also cannot simply take the administration at its word – Congress must ensure there is a viable plan to keep Americans safe, and that the administration is executing that plan appropriately.

This means taking an honest look at where we are now and how we got here. It means assessing the facts on the ground to figure out what’s working, what’s not working, and why. And it means providing the government with the funds necessary to develop and implement an effective strategy, but in a way that’s effective and accountable to the taxpayers.

There’s no time to waste. Let’s get on the right track and lead, so that we can all win this global fight against Ebola.

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